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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RIYADH 002292

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DOHA FOR SRICE

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TAGS: [ENERG](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: SAUDI NUCLEAR POWER PROPOSALS: MORE BARK THAN BITE

REF: RIYADH 2264

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires David Rundell for reasons
1.4 b, d, and e

Summary

11. (C) In a November 13 meeting, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Naif Al-Sudeiry, Deputy Director of International Organizations, told us that Foreign Minister Prince Saud al Faisal's recent proposal to set up a body to provide uranium to Iran through a consortium arrangement was essentially a trial balloon, and he did not believe a formal proposal had been provided to the Iranians. He told us the Iranians had rebuffed the Saudi proposal. At this point, the uranium proposal appears to be largely political, with no specific Saudi program or technology behind it. Interlocutors from the King Abdulaziz Center for Science and Technology (KACST) confirmed that Saudi Arabia has no on-going nuclear power research program, and explained their role as the KSA's regulator for the limited medical and industrial use of radioactive materials which do occur.

Enriched Uranium Bank Trial
Balloon Shot Down

12. (C) MFA Deputy Director Sudeiry told Energy Attache that the Saudi proposal was similar to proposals from the EU and the U.S. Senate to form an international uranium bank. He stated FM Prince Saud, to the best of his knowledge, had never formally submitted an official proposal to the Iranians regarding the uranium consortium. Instead, he believed Prince Saud had floated his proposal to the Iranians solely through the press. He stated the Iranians had rejected the initiative anyway in much the same manner, via the French press agency.

GCC Nuclear Power Study to be Announced

13. (C) Sudeiry indicated the GCC had carried out a feasibility study on the integrated production of nuclear power and desalinated water, and there likely would be an announcement on the study at the upcoming GCC Summit in Doha from December 3-4. He indicated the study was the conclusion to a series of three meetings with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), with which the GCC was cooperating on its potential nuclear power program. Sudeiry assessed that it is still 'very early' to know if the GCC will decide to move ahead with nuclear power, and he believes it largely depends on the price of oil. He noted that Saudi Arabia was fully committed to working within the IAEA framework on any nuclear initiative. Sudeiry also confirmed that Saudi Arabia currently does not have a nuclear power development program, and the nuclear power discussion is largely policy-oriented at this point. Were Saudi Arabia to press ahead on developing nuclear power, he believes a new national authority might be created to oversee the program, and a new ministry formed to implement it.

KACST: Technical Advisor Only

14. (SBU) In a November 14 meeting with HH Prince Dr. Turki bin Saud bin Mohamed al Saud, Vice President for Research Institutes, KACST, and Dr. Khaled Abdulaziz El-Issa, Director of the Nuclear Research Institute, KACST, they stressed that KACST plays a purely technical, policy-neutral role. They were adamant that KACST does not provide policy advice, noting, for example, that evaluating the relative merits of different energy options to meet the KSA's growing demands would be outside of their

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competency, stating government economists would undertake such work. Prince Turki and Dr. El-Issa concurred with the MFA's Sudeiry that Saudi Arabia has no active nuclear power development program.

On-Going Nuclear Research Programs
in Saudi Arabia

15. (SBU) Prince Turki and Dr. El-Issa laid out the general scope of nuclear activities in the KSA, and KACST's role in regulating use of radioactive materials.

--KACST currently regulates and sets standards for all nuclear activities in the country. For example, KACST regulates the use of radioactive materials in the oil industry, medical industry, and factories. El-Issa noted KACST had recently hosted a workshop on the safe use and control of radioactive materials.

--KACST has an Atomic Energy Research Institute, one of seven research institutes within KACST.

-At Riyadh's King Faisal hospital, the country's leading specialist hospital, there is limited on-site production of radioactive materials for medical purposes, which are used immediately. The materials degrade quickly, usually within two hours.

--In Jeddah, there is a nuclear engineering department within King Abdulaziz University.

In previous meetings with Senate Staffer Brad Bowman and Pol Off Sheehan, Dr. El-Issa has stated:

--Saudi Arabia is not pursuing a nuclear program of any type at this time, and has no nuclear energy capability now. It approves of a country's right to pursue peaceful nuclear power. El-Issa estimated Saudi Arabia was 15

years away from being able to develop nuclear power.

--Saudi Arabia,s technical research in the nuclear area is not very advanced, and less than 100 people are employed in the research sector.

--If and when Saudi Arabia chooses to develop nuclear power, KACST would have an oversight managerial role. The Ministry of Power might implement the actual program.

--Saudi Arabia has three stations for the detection of ambient radiation, part of a cooperative worldwide radiation detection program.

Comment

16. (C) We see the GCC nuclear power proposals, including FM Prince Saud's recent consortium proposal, largely as politically driven at this point. These proposals are probably designed to influence Iran,s behavior, while leaving the door open for the GCC to develop civilian nuclear power in the future. The announcement does not reflect a well-developed nuclear energy research program on the ground in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, we do not see Saudi Arabia investing large resources in the nuclear option at this point. The GCC civilian nuclear proposals probably are designed for the GCC to demonstrate to Iran that nations in the region can obtain reliable access to enriched uranium by working with the international community through approved mechanisms, and that they can do so faster than Iran can, working on its own and against the international community. This would potentially allow the Gulf states to lead the way for Iran out of the current impasse in a non-confrontational manner, and to call Iran,s bluff on potential military use of uranium.

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